



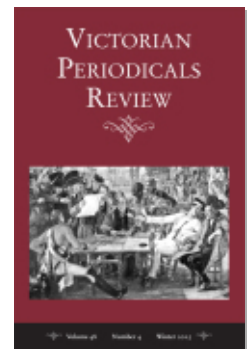
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Introduction: Waterloo and Its Afterlife in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical and Newspaper Press

CHRISTOPHER M. KEIRSTEAD AND MARYSA DEMOOR

On June 18, 1815, three armies confronted each other on a large plain fifteen kilometers to the south of Brussels between the villages of Waterloo, Braine L'Alleud (Eigenbrakel), and Plancenoit. The commanding officers on the allied side were the Duke of Wellington and Prince Blücher, whose armies represented six nations; the leader on the French side was Napoleon Bonaparte. At the end of that day, the battle of Waterloo was to be remembered as one of the greatest victories in British history.

This year, the bicentenary of Waterloo was commemorated alongside the centenary of the battle of Ieper and the sexcentenary of the battle of Agincourt. Much of what we know about Waterloo was passed on to us through the medium of the press. But curiously enough, World War I seems to have nearly obliterated the memory of this defining battle—so much so that even a large proportion of the British population now believes that Wellington was defeated at Waterloo.¹ This may be on account of the English expression “to meet your Waterloo,” meaning “to meet your defeat.” However, in 1815 and over the course of the nineteenth century, Waterloo was seen as a glorious victory over the French, and Wellington was viewed as its superhuman hero.

In the village of Waterloo, the place that gave its name to the battle, the event has never been forgotten. The house where the Duke of Wellington established his headquarters is now a small museum. In one of its most striking rooms, visitors are shown how Wellington, the day after the battle, sat down to write his report for the *Times*. Today, tourists can buy a facsimile of the *Times* issue containing the dispatch. Wellington's decision to publicize his victory highlights the importance of the press in the early nineteenth century. In this issue of *VPR*, we have gathered a selection of essays that demonstrate the impact of the battle of Waterloo on the

nineteenth-century press. What these papers reveal about the press and its contemporary readers is a rich, complex, and at times surprising engagement with questions of politics, national identity, and genre.

As Philip Shaw writes in *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (2002), “Waterloo was perceived . . . from the outset, as a mythic event occurring outside the texture of documentary or annualized history.”² Fittingly, then, we turn first to poetry as an attempt to gauge what was understood to be the battle’s deeper mythic or spiritual significance. Marysa Demoor’s “Waterloo as a Small ‘Realm of Memory’: British Writers, Tourism, and the Periodical Press” reveals that the “matter of Waterloo” could take on any number of guises in verse and was duly enshrined in epic, for instance, as early as 1816 with Henry Davidson’s *Waterloo: A Poem* and David Home Buchan’s *The Battle of Waterloo: A Poem*. Tennyson also got in on the act—much later, of course, and in more elegiac, if not epic, form with his “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” (1852), the first separately published work he produced as poet laureate. For Tennyson, Wellington was a model of measured, hopeful progress, “moderate, resolute, / Whole in himself, a common good,” whose victory at Waterloo was his crowning act of civic patience: “So great a soldier taught us there / What long-enduring hearts could do / In that world-earthquake, Waterloo!”³ Drawing on Pierre Nora’s concept of the “realm of memory,” Demoor zeroes in on verse inspired by visiting the scene of the battle itself, exploring the unique ways that this specific kind of poetic discourse supported the myth-making work of British identity. Some of the most notable poets of the early nineteenth century—including Walter Scott, Robert Southey, and William Wordsworth—made Waterloo the subject of travel poetry, as would Byron, more famously, if less patriotically, in the third canto of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Waterloo was the most sacred place of English national feeling on the Continent but one that quickly took on a less savory reputation as a site overrun with tourists and the locals who attempted to profit from them. Waterloo demanded, in a sense, a unique kind of traveling poetic recuperation. Demoor contextualizes these poetic efforts with prose travel accounts of Waterloo, including travel essays in *Fraser’s Magazine* and *Household Words* that took on some of the same generic tendencies as the poetry. In closing, Demoor’s piece also draws our attention to a little-known sonnet by Dante Gabriel Rossetti on his impressions of a tour of the battlefield which attempts to demystify its sacred ground and cast a more cosmopolitan reflection on the battle’s significance.

Emma Butcher’s “Napoleonic Periodicals and the Childhood Imagination: The Influence of War Commentary on Charlotte and Branwell Brontë’s Glass Town and Angria,” reveals how, even for those born after Waterloo, the periodical press continued to shape impressions of the battle’s historical significance and its major protagonists. In this respect, her article

calls to mind Jenny Uglow's recent book, *In These Times: Living in Britain Through Napoleon's Wars, 1793–1815* (2015), which stresses how important the periodical press was in the formation of national public opinion on Britain's international engagements: "Men and women interested in politics and the progress of the war devoured papers, pamphlets, and monthly and quarterly journals, discussing them in the book clubs that met in many towns."⁴ Those who could not afford to buy journals or newspapers could gain access to them more cheaply through subscription reading rooms. The Brontës, Butcher reminds us, subscribed to *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's* magazines, while also borrowing a number of other periodicals from friends and neighbors, including *John Bull*, the *United Service Journal*, and *Bell's Life in London*. Butcher traces some of the specific connections between various pieces published in these journals and the portrayal of Wellington and Napoleon in the siblings' colonial kingdom of Glass Town, the fantastical setting for Charlotte's *Two Romantic Tales* (1829) and Branwell's *The History of the Young Men* (1829). Zamorna and Northangerland, as the two generals were re-fashioned, became in essence the Brontës' own critical and imaginative response to debates about heroism, celebrity, honor, and manhood being staged in the press of the time.

Ann Collins's "Courts Martial and Libel: A Waterloo Officer's Military Career and the Contemporary Press" offers another kind of case study for how newspapers and periodicals influenced public perceptions of honor, duty, and heroism. She draws attention to the influence of the press on the career of a specific combatant at Waterloo: Captain John Tucker (1780–1852) of the 27th (Inniskilling) Regiment of Foot. Tucker was severely wounded in one of the fiercest engagements of the battle—what came to be known as the "square of the dead"—only to find himself facing a court martial four months later over a relatively minor series of offences unrelated to the battle itself. As Collins reveals, the charges were largely trumped up by his battalion commander, Colonel Lemuel Warren, in retaliation for Tucker's refusal to support the reinstatement of another officer who had earlier been dismissed from the regiment. Tucker was found guilty of only one of five charges, but it was enough to get him dismissed from the army. However, when Wellington overturned the judgement on appeal and the Prince Regent publicly lambasted Warren's conduct, an event that might have otherwise slipped quietly from public notice began to take on a new and complex life of its own in the military press of the day. Notably, the editor of the *Military Register*, which had come to Tucker's support, would lose a libel suit for printing remarks about Warren that fell well short of the Prince Regent's in severity. Collins's article not only underscores the evolving, murky line between what was considered private and public with respect to military careers and reputations but also reveals how the periodical press archive allows us to trace the turbulent path that Tucker's

career subsequently followed, including a later court martial in 1822 that also appears to have been engineered by his rivals. Before his death in 1852, however, Tucker was able to gain a small measure of control over his identity in print by publishing popular biographies of Wellington and Nelson, among other military subjects.

As one might expect, by mid-century it had become almost routine for champions of constitutional monarchy to summon Britain's triumph at Waterloo against competing historical narratives that saw political unrest on the Continent and Chartist calls for the franchise at home as harbingers of a more republican and democratic future. Tennyson, for instance, instructs those "confused by brainless mobs and lawless Powers" to look instead to Wellington and that "sober freedom out of which there springs / Our loyal passion for our temperate kings!"⁵ What is more surprising, perhaps, is how many of those seeking to empower the disenfranchised were just as keen to deploy Waterloo for their own rhetorical advantage. In "The Waterloo of Democracy against Despotism: Chartist Internationalism and Poetic Repetition in the *Labourer*, 1847–48," Barbara Barrow reveals how Jones, through his work as editor and contributor to the short-lived *Labourer*, endeavored to reinvent Waterloo as a symbol of international cooperation and armed resistance to tyrannical oppression. Barrow begins by reminding us that Wellington, far from being a distant historical icon in 1848, was literally at the forefront of resistance to the Chartist "uprising" as commander of the special military and police force called together to protect the capital from what turned out to be a peaceful gathering of petitioners at Kennington Common. Thus, the memory and symbolic capital of Waterloo were ready at hand in contemporary efforts in the periodical press to shape public perceptions of and support for reform, with Wellington, for instance, alternately praised and ridiculed for his role at Kennington Common. Barrow argues that Jones, beginning with the first issue of the *Labourer*, took advantage of the "unity in miscellany" afforded by the format of the journal to juxtapose, for instance, politically inflected verse with an open letter from an Irish curate to Wellington detailing some of the suffering he had witnessed during the famine. The poems themselves contain numerous allusions to Wellington and Napoleon, with the threat of another Waterloo—this one finally overthrowing the old regimes of Europe—becoming part a rhetorical strategy of "repetition and refrain" in Jones's periodical verse.

Our issue concludes with Tom Gretton's "Waterloo in Richard Caton Woodville's 'Battles of the British Army' Series for the *Illustrated London News*, 1893–99." Gretton's article provides a revealing glimpse into the creative, editorial, and economic decision-making that went into the production of the full- and double-page illustrations that helped to make the *Illustrated London News* the flagship illustrated newspaper of its day.

Despite Woodville's need to appeal to a mass-market audience and meet his employer's other production demands, his illustrations testify to his deep knowledge of historical and contemporary approaches to military genre painting. Close analysis of the staging, composition, and perspective of the illustrations reveals a careful, strategic effort to celebrate a specific kind of British (as opposed to exclusively English) military valor and, in the Waterloo illustrations especially, a particular form of class structure and order. At the same time, much of the historical and aesthetic precedent that informed his painting was appropriately—and ironically enough—French. Woodville was in fact living in Paris at the time he was working on the series, which is reflected in its many allusions to Gérôme and Delacroix, among other French painters, including the latter's already iconic image of Liberty leading the people (who becomes a sergeant holding a British flag in one illustration). As Gretton suggests, however, this kind of gesture was "more ironic than slanderous" toward the French, a tacit acknowledgement that British painting offered nothing that could compete with the French in this particular field. Overall, Woodville's creation of an illustrative series celebrating British military history that simultaneously imbedded itself in a more French or pan-European art historical narrative testifies to the sophisticated and multiple levels of irony at play in his work. And in this respect, his illustrations form a fitting capstone to the complex historical, ideological, and aesthetic dialogue that distinguish all of the periodical engagements with the history and legacy of Waterloo in this special issue.

If Waterloo remains, as we remarked at the outset, a byword for resounding and decisive final acts, the articles collected here should serve to remind us that no such conflict, especially one fought at such human cost, ever really achieves anything akin to ideological or historical "closure." The battle, in some sense, continued to be refought in the press over the course of the nineteenth century, with implications, as we demonstrate here, for a diverse cast of historical and literary figures—from actual combatants, such as John Tucker, to those who made the battle and its protagonists central figures in their creative work, such as Richard Caton Woodville, Ernest Jones, and Charlotte and Branwell Brontë. For them, as for the poets Marysa Demoor analyzes, Waterloo was perhaps the central event in living historical memory. For us, the bicentennial of Waterloo, like the centennial of World War I, should serve as a reminder of histories not to be repeated.

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NOTES

1. Simon de Bruxelles, "History Meets Its Waterloo," *Times*, online edition, April 17, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article4413762.ece>.
2. Philip Shaw, *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 3.
3. Alfred Tennyson, "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," in *The Complete Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), lines 25–26, 131–33.
4. Jenny Uglow, *In These Times: Living in Britain Through Napoleon's Wars, 1793–1815* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015), 5.
5. Tennyson, "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," lines 153, 164–65.